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SUBJECT: FINLAND: PRE-GAERC RESPONSE

REF: STATE 22352

¶1. (U) PolChief discussed the GAERC talking points with Finnish MFA EU Correspondent Leena-Kaisa Mikkola March ¶4.

¶2. (SBU) WESTERN BALKANS: Mikkola noted that several member states insisted on a "Western Balkans" agenda point, rather than simply a specific Kosovo point. Some agreed that it was important to emphasize that, following the very intensive period surrounding Kosovo's independence, the EU needed to return to focusing on the challenges facing the region as a whole. Unfortunately, she added, others -- particularly those who are not part of the Kosovo ISG or "those who are not so excited about the Ahtisaari plan" hoped to steer the GAERC away from any conclusions in relation to the ISG (none are expected). A discussion of practicalities and the challenges facing the EU Mission in Kosovo is expected.

¶3. (SBU) ISRAEL-PALESTINE: The GoF welcomes Secretary Rice's trip to the region, and Mikkola noted that HighRep Solana is in the region this week. Solana will brief the GAERC on his trip, but conclusions are not expected unless his report gives cause otherwise.

¶4. (SBU) AFGHANISTAN: Mikkola suggested that Afghanistan was on the agenda simply because many MS believed it had not been a focus of GAERC discussions for some time. She noted that the Slovenian Presidency did not seem particularly enthusiastic about including it but honored the request. The GoF, for its part, is the second highest contributor of trainers to the EU police training mission, and therefore welcomes the discussion, she said.

¶5. (SBU) GEORGIA: Mikkola noted that the discussion could be quite lively, given that some member states are aggressively pushing for the EU to rapidly enhance its relationship with Georgia, while others strongly prefer to keep the discussion "low profile." Finland -- along with the Baltic MS and others -- supports more rapid EU movement on building the relationship, to include more movement on visa facilitation and other people-to-people exchanges, Mikkola said.

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